Summer Reading 2015

CP English 12: World Lit

CP Grade 12

Anthem – Ayn Rand
Siddhartha – Herman Hesse

This summer, you are invited to read two short, but excellent novels, Hesse’s Siddhartha and Rand’s Anthem. These are novels about the ways in which characters seek spiritual freedom, personal enlightenment, and self-empowerment, things we all yearn for in our lives. In spite of their apparent similarities though, you will notice that these two enriching works are distinct products of two diverse cultural traditions. Siddhartha is a novel which is rooted deeply in Eastern philosophy, while Anthem stems from a distinctly Western tradition and culture. As you read the novels, continue to ask yourself this question: Are the protagonists of the two novels symbols or reflections of their contrasting cultures, or are they ultimately in search of similar human truths? The ends of each book will no doubt illuminate this question more brilliantly for you.

Note: When we return from the summer, you will be tested on these two texts. There will be questions about characters and the essential plot movements, themes and values within each text. The test will be partly objective and partly short answer-oriented.

Finally, remember that these novels are short, manageable invitations to acquire knowledge and grow as a person. Here are novels that should help us understand the “bigger picture” that is the magnificent universe in which we live. As the great poet Wordsworth said, these are novels which allow us to “see into the life of things.”
**About *Siddhartha***

Hermann Hesse was born in 1877 in the town of Calw, on the edge of Germany’s Black Forest. He grew up in a missionary family whose religious beliefs deeply influenced him. His father was a Pietist-Lutheran who believed that humans are basically evil and need to be disciplined. Hesse’s parents and grandparents had been missionaries in the Far East, however, and the spirituality and literature of Indians, Buddhists, and Middle Eastern cultures balanced Hesse’s father’s teachings.

Family and friends assumed that Hesse would one day become a member of the clergy, but Hesse did not take easily to the traditional teachings of the church. At the urging of his father, he entered the Maulbronn seminary at the age of fourteen but was soon expelled. A dark period followed, and Hesse experienced problems with severe depression and anger. Though he attempted to continue his studies, he had difficulty managing them. His teachers found him to be both precocious and rebellious, and he transferred schools several times, ultimately abandoning high school before finally graduating and returning to Calw. To make ends meet, Hesse took jobs working in bookstores. He spent much of his time at home with his father, where he read many of his grandfather’s books on Eastern religion and philosophy. During this period he began to insinuate himself into Germany’s circles of aspiring authors.

In 1904, at the age of thirty-seven, Hesse published his first novel, *Peter Camenzind*. A work that featured some unquestionably autobiographical content, Hesse’s debut novel told the tale of an idealistic and driven youth who leaves his home in a Swiss mountain village to become a poet. Hesse’s follow-up novel in 1906, *Unterm Rad*, also contained many autobiographical elements from Hesse’s own adolescence. *Unterm Rad* is the story of a schoolboy who feels completely alienated from his contemporaries and flees from his school to travel through a variety of cities.
World War I galvanized Hesse as a political being and as an author. An avowed pacifist, Hesse joined the antiwar movement and plunged himself vigorously into writing antiwar novels and propaganda. He also edited two newspapers for German prisoners of war. But the war also sent him spiraling into a period of self-doubt and personal reflection. All of this took its toll on Hesse’s private life, eventually leading to the breakup of his first marriage. Hesse meditated on the divorce, both indirectly and sometimes very directly, in the novels *Knulp* and *Rosshalde*. During this time, Hesse began studying the psychoanalytic works of Sigmund Freud. Excited by this relatively new discipline, Hesse voluntarily became a patient in a mental hospital and underwent psychiatric analysis with Freud’s most famous prodigy, Carl Jung.

In 1919, after the war, Hesse moved permanently to Switzerland and published *Demian*. The novel, an instant commercial and critical success, reflects Hesse’s fascination with Freud’s conception of the subconscious and Jungian psychoanalysis, particularly Jung’s description of “individuation,” a process through which humans can become whole only by accepting both their conscious selves and their unconscious selves (such as their dreams and imagination). *Demian* also solidified Hesse’s position as one of Europe’s most eminent antiwar writers.

Throughout this time, Hesse remained interested in Eastern religions. Eager to learn more about new concepts of spirituality, he traveled several times to Asia and the Middle East. His studies eventually led to the publication of *Siddhartha* in 1922. This novel extended the themes already typical of Hesse’s work: the alienation of man from man, the alienation of man from environment, and the desire for self-knowledge. In *Siddhartha*, however, Hesse explored these themes through a specifically Buddhist point of view. The novel was a success and quickly became Hesse’s most famous book.
In 1927, Hesse wrote *Steppenwolf*, another major work that reflected not only Hesse’s own spiritual journey but also a return to his consideration of modern political and social life in Germany. At this time, the seeds of World War II were being planted, and Hesse seemed keenly aware of the dangers of the fascist state about to grip Germany. *Steppenwolf* examines one man who is torn between his base animal impulses and his desire for social respectability, but it also portrays a Germany torn by anti-Semitism, poverty, and a crushing coldness of the soul.

*The Glass Bead Game: (Magister Ludi)*, Hesse’s last major work, was published in 1943. In this broad-ranging and very long book, which consists of several interconnected novels and novellas, Hesse continued to meditate upon the same themes of pacifism, Eastern religion, and the ultimate goal of self-knowledge and enlightenment. In the opening tale of *The Glass Bead Game*, Hesse imagines a future in which academics and celibate priests have merged into a single entity, and in which the twentieth century has come to be known in retrospect as the century most famous for war in all of history.

In 1946, Hesse was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. He lived the rest of his life quietly in Switzerland and died in 1962 at the age of eighty-five.

**Siddhartha by Herman Hesse**

*Siddhartha*, the son of a Brahmin, a Hindu Priest, and his best friend, *Govinda*, have grown up learning the ways of the Brahmins. Everyone in their village loves Siddhartha. But although he brings joy to everyone’s life, Siddhartha feels little joy himself. He is troubled by restless dreams and begins to suspect that he has learned all that his father and the other Brahmins can teach him. Siddhartha’s search for a new path leads him to seek out and join the ascetic Samanas. As a faithful friend and kindred spirit, Govinda accompanies him.
As Samanas, the pair of friends relinquish all of their possessions and practice mortification of the flesh, especially through fasting. Siddhartha sought out pain because when pain looses its power over one's body, the Self fades into oblivion and peace is attained. But while pain soon becomes a memory, peace does not come. Ultimately, Siddhartha reasons that one cannot really learn anything from teachers or the doctrines they espouse. The knowledge he seek lies within, in Atman, the element of the divine within him.

Three years after joining the Samanas, Siddhartha and Govinda hear rumors of a great man, Goatama, the Illustrious, the Buddha, who wanders the country preaching the way to enlightenment. Siddhartha and Govinda travel to Savathi, where they discover that the Buddha is staying in Jetavana, in the garden of Anathapindika. The two men hear Gotama's sermon, after which Govinda announces his intention to join in Goatama's discipleship. Siddhartha commends Govinda for his decision, but refuses to join himself.

The next day, Govinda takes his monk's robe and bids Siddhartha a sad farewell. As Siddhartha is leaving, he runs into Goatama in the woods. Despite his awe, Siddhartha gathers the courage to speak to the Buddha. Siddhartha compliments the theoretical coherence of Gotama's worldview, the ultimate unity of creation and the incessant chain of causes and effects, but argues that Goatama's doctrine of salvation, the transcendence of causation, calls into question the consistency of his position. Goatama responds that he does not seek to explain the world but to achieve salvation from suffering. Judging it by the former standard is inappropriate. Siddhartha says he must find salvation on his own, and the Buddha wishes him well in his quest.

As Siddhartha leaves the Buddha, he realizes that a change has overcome him. Whereas he formerly reviled the world as a painful illusion, a distraction from a submerged, unitary reality, he now sees that reality resides in the world as it is, in the wondrous diversity of shapes and colors which surround him. This realization setz him apart from all of his previous associations. He is no longer a Brahmin or a Samansa, and he has resisted following his friend Govinda into the Buddha's discipleship. He more alone, yet more himself than ever.
Having left Govinda and the Buddha, Siddhartha spends the night in a Ferryman's hut. The next morning he meets the Ferryman and crosses the river. Siddhartha admits to having no money to pay for the voyage, but the Ferryman says that friendship is payment enough. Siddhartha continues on to a large town where he sees a beautiful woman being carried on a sedan chair by her servants. Smitten by her, Siddhartha determines to make her acquaintance and enters town to make himself presentable. A couple of days later, Siddhartha returns to the grove he saw the beautiful woman—he learns in town that she is a courtesan named Kamala—and begs to meet her. Making her acquaintance, he asks Kamala to teach him the art of love. Kamala responds that she will only do so when Siddhartha obtains nice clothes, shoes, and money with which to buy her gifts.

At Kamala's request, Siddhartha goes to see Kamaswami, the merchant. Siddhartha moves into the merchant's house and learns about business. Soon he is living on his own and visiting Kamala for his love lessons. After interacting with the ordinary people of the town for some time, Siddhartha realizes that his past as a Samana has driven a wedge between them and him. He possesses a distance from his emotions and behaviors that ordinary people do not possess. The only aspect of his life that he does feel truly involved in is the time he spends with Kamala, who he admits knows him better than anyone ever.

Eventually, Siddhartha begins to feel a great attachment to his ordinary life. This transition was not easy, though. While he excites his senses and lessens the distance between himself and his daily activities, Siddhartha does not possess the sense of importance with which ordinary people live their lives, and for this he envied them. He gives himself completely to his acquisitiveness and his insatiable desire to consume. He begins gambling as a way to show his contempt for riches, but soon the thrill of the game becomes its own reward; the higher the stakes, the more potent the intoxication. This downward spiral is finally arrested by a dream Siddhartha has of Kamala's songbird. Upon waking, Siddhartha realizes that he is tired of his present life, his hedonistic routine, and his possessions. Siddhartha then leaves the town, never to return.
After leaving town, Siddhartha returns to the river where had met the Ferryman earlier. Disillusioned with himself and the world, he contemplates suicide. Overwhelmed, Siddhartha falls into a deep sleep. When he awakes he feels refreshed and happy, and sees that his old friend Govinda is near him. They two friends speak briefly, and then Govinda returns to the Buddha. Siddhartha sits by the river for a while and considers his life. He concludes that although his recent existence has almost pressed him to suicide, it was good for him to have lived it. He is now ready to complete his life's journey.

Intrigued by the river's beauty and silent wisdom, Siddhartha decides to stay by the river. Siddhartha soon meets the Ferryman Vasuveda, the same man who took him across the river earlier. Siddhartha offers to be Vasuveda's apprentice, an offer which the Ferryman graciously accepts. The two grow together as Siddhartha begins to learn the river's wisdom, and soon Siddhartha begins to emulate Vasuveda's demeanor, expressing a contented peace in the routine of daily life. Years pass. One day, the two Ferrymen hear that the Buddha is dying. Kamala, on hearing the news as well, travels with her son to be near Goatama. As she passes near the river, she is bitten by a snake and dies, but not before she is taken by Vasuveda to Siddhartha. After Kamala dies, Siddhartha keeps his son with him by the river. The boy, though, refuses to accept Siddhartha as his father and consequently does nothing he is told. Many months pass, but the boy remains intransigent. Eventually the boy runs away. Vasuveda tells Siddhartha to let him go, but Siddhartha follows him. Upon reaching the town, Siddhartha recalls his own experiences there and admits to himself what he knew all along, that he could not help the boy. Siddhartha feels a great sorrow at this loss, and the happiness he had known as a Ferryman leaves him. Vasuveda soon arrives and leads the despondent Siddhartha to back to the river.

The pain of losing his son was long-lasting for Siddhartha. It enabled him, however, to identify with ordinary people more than ever before. Though Siddhartha was beginning to understand what wisdom really is, the thought of son did not leave him. One day he sets off in search of his son, but stops as he heard the river laughing at him. He looks into the river, sees his own father whom he had left, and turns back.
Siddhartha tells Vasuveda all of what he had thought, but as he does, Siddhartha notices a change in the old man. Vasuveda leads Siddhartha back to the river, imploring him to listen deeply. At first Siddhartha hears only the voices of sorrow, but these voices are soon joined by voices of joy, and at last all the voices are subsumed under the great sound of "Om." Realizing the unity of these voices, Siddhartha's pain fades away. He finds salvation. Recognizing his friend's achievement, Vasuveda departs into the woods to die, thereby joining the unity he has helped Siddhartha find at last.

Not long after Vasuveda's departure, Govinda hears rumors of a Ferryman who is a sage. Still restless and unsatisfied after all his years of searching, Govinda goes to speak to the Ferryman. The Ferryman, Siddhartha, recognizes Govinda immediately, though Govinda does not recognize him. When Siddhartha finally addresses Govinda by name, Govinda recognizes him. Happy to have reunited after so long, Govinda spends the night at Siddhartha's hut. Govinda asks Siddhartha what are the doctrines by which he lives. Siddhartha repeats his oft mentioned refrain that he eschews teachers and doctrines, arguing that while knowledge is communicable, wisdom is not. He says that expressing love and admiration toward all things is the most important thing in the world. Govinda is confused by most of what Siddhartha says, but he feels certain that his old friend is a holy man. Preparing to leave, Govinda asks Siddhartha for something to help him along his path. Siddhartha tells Govinda to kiss his forehead. Doing so causes Govinda to see a continuous stream of different faces in place of Siddhartha's. Overwhelmed by this display of unity and timelessness, Govinda falls to ground, tears flowing uncontrollably.

About Anthem

Anthem is one of Ayn Rand's earlier works, and presages the fears of collectivism that characterize Objectivism and her later work, such as The Fountainhead and Atlas Shrugged. The novel is set in the future and has a universal, timeless feel in its characterization of an ideal character's struggle against a monolithic state. Over the course of this relatively short novella, Rand sets the individual against the collective and concludes that the rational celebration of self is the only avenue
through which technological and societal progress can occur without the suppression of free will.

Rand wrote *Anthem* in 1937, as a break in her composition of *The Fountainhead*, and she published it in 1938, with a revised and more commonly read version appearing in 1946. As in the case of many contemporary writers of dystopian fiction, such as George Orwell with *Animal Farm*, Rand initially wrote her novel as a warning against Soviet Communism before the end of World War II, but did not receive a popular audience until the Russians were no longer wartime allies of Western Europe and the United States. At the time, some contemporary philosophers still supported the Soviet Union, and even those who saw problems with the regime such as George Orwell believed that less extreme versions such as socialism might still have legitimate value. Rand, on the other hand, rejected all forms of collectivism as inherently flawed, a conclusion that undoubtedly had roots in her experiences in early twentieth-century Russia.

Rand was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1905, the year which marked the defeat of the Russians by the rising military power of the Japanese. In the same year, domestic troubles combined with increasingly bad news abroad sparked a minor revolution -- which proved in many ways a practice run for the future Communist leaders. Twelve years after Rand's birth, the February Revolution caused the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, and eight months later, Lenin led the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution and wrested power away from the more moderate elements. In the upheaval, Rand's family lost their prosperous business and descended into poverty. Rand became increasingly disgusted with the ill effects of Communism and immigrated to the United States in 1926 after the rise of Stalin in the early 1920s -- but shortly before the purges of the Communist Party and the mass collectivization of agriculture which led to much conflict among the kulaks, or rich peasants.
Unsurprisingly, given her background, Rand was a staunch opponent of Communism before and during the Cold War, and she undoubtedly had the pro-socialist elements of the West in mind as well as some of the more socialist elements of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal when she wrote *Anthem*. In her view, collectivism led inevitably to the persecution of people with original ideas, as well as to the punishment of the able by forcing them to serve the state. As demonstrated in *Anthem*, Rand believed that too much focus on the state led only to the erasure of human rights, and through *Equality 7-2521*’s search for the Unspeakable Word "I", and through the collectivist naming system, she also echoes the Soviet use of propaganda, particularly via the Agitprop department of the Communist Party. Unlike Orwell, who portrayed the Soviet future of *1984* as suppressive through the use of technology, Rand believed that a collectivist society would regress into a repetition of the Dark Ages, further adding to the dystopian nature of her collectivist state.

In *Anthem*, Equality 7-2521 is the embodiment of many Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution values of individualism and progress. Part of the reason why Ayn Rand's writings have become so popular in American society is because she implicitly celebrates American progress in the Gilded Age of the late nineteenth century as the result of the thirst for knowledge and of the drive of individuals, as well as of the emphasis on the rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" declared in the American Revolution. Equality 7-2521 battles in a mental struggle against the tyranny of the group, and he eventually succeeds against those individuals -- such as the Scholars -- who take the path of least resistance and uphold the collectivist status quo. He is a typical Randian hero, with a hard, strong body and a fearless, proud, and active mind to match, and in the end, he affirms the right to individually driven production.
Anthem by Ayn Rand

The story of *Anthem* takes place in some unspecified future time and place in which freedom and individual rights have been obliterated. Collectivism — the political philosophy holding that an individual exists solely to serve the state — is dominant and has led to the establishment of a global dictatorship of the Fascist or Communist variety.

Equality 7-2521 is a Street Sweeper of the city, having been chosen for this profession by the Council of Vocations. However, he has always been fascinated by the phenomena of nature and can't help but wonder what power of the sky causes lightning and how it can be harnessed to human benefit. Because of his fascination with the Science of Things, he secretly desires to be sent to the Home of the Scholars. He has been taught that it is a sin to harbor secret ambitions, and so believes he is guilty, though strangely, he feels no pangs of wrongdoing.

One day while sweeping the streets, Equality 7-2521 comes upon a metal grill leading down into a dark tunnel. The tunnel is clearly a remnant of the Unmentionable Times, the ancient period prior to the establishment of the present society. Equality 7-2521 sneaks to the tunnel alone every night, where safe from others beneath the ground he secretly performs scientific experiments. As the story opens, this private research has been occurring for two years.

In that time, he also meets Liberty 5-3000. She is a young woman who works in the fields and lives in the Home of the Peasants beyond the city. Men and women are forbidden to take notice of each other except at the Time of Mating, the period each spring when the Council of Eugenics pairs off men and women into couples for one night for the purpose of procreating. But in his own mind, Equality 7-2521 takes such notice of Liberty 5-3000 that he gives her a different name. He thinks of her as the Golden One. He commits yet another transgression by speaking to her, and it is clear that she takes notice of him.
He has forbidden thoughts. In the night, he wonders about the Uncharted Forests that exist across the land, covering the cities of the Unmentionable Times. He thinks of the Script Fire in which the books of the Evil Ones were burned, and he wonders about the secrets of the Evil Ones that have been lost to the world. Mostly, he wonders about the Unspeakable Word, the one idea held by the Evil Ones that has been lost. He remembers the fate of one who had discovered that word and had spoken it. His tongue had been ripped out, and he was burned at the stake. As a 10-year-old child, Equality 7-2521 had witnessed the execution. The transgressor seemed noble, and the child had thought that this was the face of one of the Saints about whom children had been taught. To the young Equality 7-2521, this Saint of the Pyre seemed to have gazed at him, picking him out from the crowd of onlookers. What, he wonders late at night, is the Unspeakable Word?

In his experiments, Equality 7-2521 discovers electricity. He uses it, after much effort, to create an electric light. He thinks that this light can be used to light the cities of the world. He wishes to show it to others, but knows that they will not understand and be frightened. In a month, the World Council of Scholars meets in his city. He knows what to do. The wisest minds among humankind will be there. They are the only ones who can understand his gift. He will wait and show it to them, and they will know how best to employ it for the good of society. And he will be welcomed among them as one of the Scholars.

But when he demonstrates his invention, they are frightened. They call him an "evil wretch" for daring to think that a lowly Street Sweeper can possess greater wisdom than that of the Council. He has broken all the laws, and must be severely punished. Equality 7-2521 acknowledges that they are right and does not care what happens to him. But the light, he pleads. What will you do with the light? They point out that he is alone in believing that he has invented a great new product — and that what is not believed by all cannot be true. They point out that if he is right, then his discovery will bring ruin to the Department of Candles and confusion to the Plans of the World Council. For it took 50 years to get approval for the candle from all the Councils, and to change the Plans again so soon would be impossible.
Their conclusion is unanimous: The light is an evil thing and must be destroyed.

Before they can seize it, he takes it in his arms, smashes the glass of the window with his fist and leaps through it. He runs through the streets of the city, escaping to the Uncharted Forest. He doesn't know where he is going — indeed there is no place to go — but he must get away. He believes that he will perish in the forest. He accepts that and is not afraid, only he wishes to be away from the city and from "air that touches upon the air of the city." He plunges deeper into the Uncharted Forest.

But he does not die. He awakens on the first day in the forest with a realization of freedom. There is no longer anyone to tell him what to do. The next day, he hears footsteps behind him. He hides in the bushes, but there is no need, for it is the Golden One. She had heard of his escape, because the whole city is speaking of it. On the night that she heard it, she bolted from the Home of the Peasants and followed his trail through the forest. She says she would rather be damned with him than blessed with all her brothers. He takes her in his arms, and that night he discovers that to make love to a woman is "the one ecstasy granted to the race of men." He is frightened only by the realization that he had lived for 21 years and never known what joy is possible to men.

They come upon an abandoned home from the Unmentionable Times. They enter it and wonder at the sights they behold — at the bright colors, the mirrors, the clothes, and the books. Equality 7-2521 declares that the home will be theirs. He finds that the books are written in the language that he speaks, and he reads them.
In his reading, he discovers the word "I." When he grasps its meaning, he cries tears of deliverance, realizing that this is the holy word that humans have had taken away from them. His reading teaches him that persons are individuals, not splintered fragments of the group; they have a right to pursue their happiness, and should not sacrifice themselves for others; that they require freedom to do this, and must not be enslaved by the group. When he understands this, he takes for himself a name he finds in his reading — Prometheus — the bringer of fire. The Golden One takes the name of Gaea — the goddess who was the mother of the earth. Gaea is pregnant with his child, who will be the first-born of a new society of free humans.

Equality 7-2521 learns that his light is powered by electricity, and that the men of the Unmentionable Times had mastered it. He will learn what they knew and use the knowledge to create prosperity. He will build electric wires around his house to protect it and will steal back into the city to free his friend, International 4-8818, and any others who flock to the banner of liberty. The society he founds will make scientific and technological advances because the human mind will not be shackled; it will be free to think, to ask questions, and to explore. He believes that, in time, the world will hear of this free and prosperous society, and that the best individuals from around the globe will flood the roads leading to his city. They will live together in respect of each individual's right to live his or her own life.